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EDWARD HENRY HARRIMAN

BY JOHN MUIR



(Harriman)
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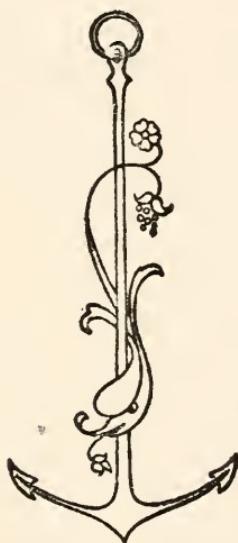


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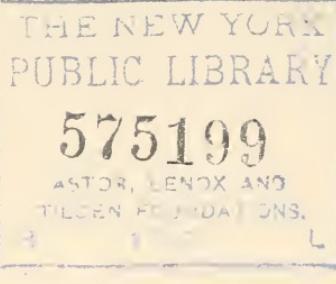
BY JOHN MUIR



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OF ALL the great builders — the famous doers of things in this busy world — none that I know of more ably and manfully did his appointed work than my friend Edward Henry Harriman. He was always ready and able. The greater his burdens, the more formidable the obstacles looming ahead of him, the greater was his enjoyment. He fairly revelled in heavy dynamical work and went about it naturally and unweariedly like glaciers making landscapes, cutting canyons through ridges, carrying off hills, laying rails and bridges over lakes and rivers, mountains and plains, making the

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nation's ways straight and smooth and safe, bringing everybody nearer to one another. He seemed to regard the whole continent as his farm and all the people as partners, stirring millions of workers into useful action, plowing, sowing, irrigating, mining, building cities and factories, farms and homes.

Nothing he had was allowed to lie idle. A great maker and harvester of crops of wealth, and of course a great spender, he used his income as seed for other crops of world-wealth in succession, sowing broadcast for present and future good, pouring back his gains again and again into new commonwealth

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currents to create new benefits, or to increase the fruitfulness of old ones after he himself had passed away. Fortunes grew along his railroads like natural fruit. Almost everything he touched sprang up into new forms, changing the face of the whole country.

In general appearance he was said to be under-sized, but though I knew him well I never noticed anything either short or tall in his stature. His head made the rest of his body all but invisible. His magnificent brow, high and broad and finely finished, oftentimes called to mind well-known portraits of Napoleon. Every feature of his

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countenance manifested power, especially his wonderful eyes, deep and frank yet piercing, inspiring confidence, though likely at first sight to keep people at a distance.

When big business plans were growing in his head he looked severe, with scarce a trace of the loving-kindness that, like hidden radium or the deep buried fires of ice-clad volcanoes, was ever glowing in his heart. Comparatively few have gained anything like adequate knowledge of the extent and warmth of his sympathies, but none who came nigh him could fail to feel his kindness, especially in his home, radiating a delightful, peaceful atmosphere,

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the finest domestic weather imaginable. His warm heart it was that endeared him to his friends, but in almost every way he was a man to admire — in apparent repose brooding his work plans, or in grand, overcoming, enthusiastic action shoving them forward, rejoicing and influencing all the country like climate; when silent in company, or at long intervals giving out something striking, saying the commonest things in unforgettable ways and making them seem uncommon in the new light flashed upon them; when severe and rigid as fate; or merry in friendly conversation, eye striking eye, thought clashing

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against thought, making wit sparkles fly.

I first heard of him in the year 1899, when my friend Dr. Merriam wrote that I was invited to join a scientific expedition to Alaska which Mr. Harriman was organizing. Unwilling to accept the hospitality of a person of whom I knew little without seeing how something like compensation might be rendered, I requested particulars of the novel plan, and was informed that Mr. Harriman was a wealthy railroad man who had been advised by his physicians to rest from overwork; that he had decided to go to Alaska, and when he considered that the

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trip would be long, and would require a good sea-going steamer he thought it a pity to lose the opportunity to render a public service. He had therefore planned an expedition to be devoted to the interests of science, instead of a health and pleasure voyage for himself and family. Accordingly, as many scientific explorers as could be accommodated had been invited, about twenty-five biologists, naturalists, ornithologists, geologists, artists, etc., with the necessary assistants for the preparation and care of specimens — making a rare company, assembled for work in a magnificent wilderness and under most favorable auspices.

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While I still hesitated a third letter was received, saying the time had come to decide, and explaining further that the expedition would not only go through the Alexander archipelago, stopping wherever we wished to work, but that Yakutat Bay, Prince William Sound, and probably Cook's Inlet would be explored; so I at last decided to go, leaving proud compensation to any chance opportunity that might offer.

I soon saw that Mr. Harriman was uncommon. He was taking a trip for rest, and at the same time managing his exploring guests as if we were a grateful, soothing, essential part of his rest-cure, though scientific

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explorers are not easily managed, and in large mixed lots are rather inflammable and explosive, especially when compressed on a ship. Nevertheless he kept us all in smooth working order; put us ashore wherever we liked, in all sorts of places — bays, coves, the mouths of streams, etc.— to suit the convenience of the different parties into which we naturally separated, dropping each with suitable provisions, taking us aboard again at given times, looking after everything to the minutest details; work enough to bring nervous prostration to ordinary mortals instead of rest.

All the Harriman family were

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aboard, together with Mr. and Mrs. Averell and their daughter Betty. Mrs. Harriman ably seconded her husband in making everything move harmoniously. The boys were very young, Roland only about two or three years of age. One of the telling sights that comes to mind as I write is Mr. Harriman keeping trot-step with little Roland while helping him to drag a toy canoe along the deck with a cotton string. The girls were so bright and eager to study the wonderful regions passed through that we were all proud to become their teachers.

We soon learned that Mr. Harriman was not only a wonderful man-

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ager of men, but that he was fearless. Nothing in his way could daunt him or abate one jot the vigor of his progress toward his aims, no matter what — going ashore through heavy breakers, sailing uncharted fiords, pursuing bears, etc. As we approached the head of one of the Prince William Sound fiords it seemed to be completely blocked by the front of a large glacier and an out-reaching headland. The local pilot, turning to our Captain Doran, said: "Here, take your ship. I am not going to be responsible for her if she is to be run into every unsounded, uncharted channel and frog marsh." The captain slowed down, and in

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a few minutes stopped, after creeping forward to within half a mile or so of the front of the ice-wall.

Then Mr. Harriman asked me if I was satisfied with what I had seen and was ready to turn back, to which I replied: "Judging from the trends of this fiord and glacier there must be a corresponding fiord or glacier to the southward, and although the ship has probably gone as far as it is safe to go, I wish you would have a boat lowered and let me take a look around that headland into the hidden half of the landscape."

"We can perhaps run the ship there," he said, and immediately

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ordered the captain to “go ahead and try to pass between the ice-wall and headland.” The passage was dangerously narrow and threatening, but gradually opened into a magnificent icy fiord about twelve miles long, stretching away to the southward. The water continuing deep, as the sounding line showed, Mr. Harriman quietly ordered the captain to go right ahead up the middle of the new fiord. “Full speed, sir?” inquired the captain. “Yes, full speed ahead.” The sail up this majestic fiord in the evening sunshine, picturesquely varied glaciers coming successively to view, sweeping from high snowy fountains

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and discharging their thundering wave-raising icebergs, was, I think, the most exciting experience of the whole trip.

Near the head of the fiord I noticed a small cove where firewood could be procured and requested to be put ashore there to study the new wilderness while the ship, which had lost one of her propeller blades, was being repaired on a smooth beach near Cordova. Mr. Gannett, the topographer, and several others joined me, and we landed a little before midnight, secured the boat, hoisted blankets and provisions up a flat-topped bluff by rope and tackle, and encamped in a magnificent Cas-

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slope garden on the margin of a forest of mountain hemlock. During the five days' absence of the steamer the fiord and the largest of the glaciers at the head of it were pretty thoroughly explored and mapped and worthily named for their discoverer, the Harriman Fiord and Harriman Glacier.

After this wonderful voyage I had occasional glimpses of Mr. Harriman when he came West, but a good many years passed before I felt that I was at all acquainted with him. He had been but little heard of, especially in the West, until the marvellous rebuilding of the Union and Southern Pacific

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railroads and their branch extensions compelled attention and made him known to the world in general as the greatest road builder and manager of the age. But it was after dark years of anxiety and sorrow that I became intimately acquainted with him and discovered the greatness of his sympathies.

I saw him in the spring of 1903 in San Francisco just before he started back home, and only a few weeks later, when I was on my way to Europe and Asia, I visited him at the Hotel Netherland, New York, where he was recovering from a dangerous surgical operation. After cheery greetings he said he was

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getting well and would soon be up and at work. "You must have suffered terribly," I said. "Oh, never mind that; you know there is always more or less pain connected with surgery, but I made the quickest time across the continent that ever was made. I made it in less than three days from San Francisco to New York, and I didn't hurry the first day, either. Troubles seldom come singly. Now we are getting out of them all — strikes on the roads, scarlet fever in the family, etc.— and this evening for the first time since these troubles commenced we are going to dine together in my room. Join us and you will

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see all the family.” But a prior engagement prevented, and I had to sail the next morning for Liverpool. Noticing I looked tired, he ordered a glass of milk for me and bade me remember there is such a thing as an electric cable, that he was president of two steamship companies, and when I got around to China and Japan, if I should happen to need anything, to let him know. And when I replied that I was already unconscionably deep in his debt, he said: “Oh, you can’t keep accounts of that kind; pass them along anywhere whenever you get the chance.”

Just as I was leaving St. Peters-

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burg for the Crimea and the Caucasus I received a long letter from him, stating that it had occurred to him after I left that a letter to his agents in Japan and China might be of use to me. No heart could escape the influence of this sort of kindness from one overladen with so many great cares. That he should have thought of me at all under such crushing circumstances was an unmistakable token of affection, and brought more clearly to view his noble-hearted loyalty and depth of character, on which all sound friendship is founded.

He spent most of the summer of 1907 at his Pelican Bay Lodge on

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Klamath Lake, in southern Oregon. On his arrival in San Francisco, when he inquired:

“You’re going to the Lodge with us, are you not?”

I said, “Yes, I shall be very glad to pay my respects to Mrs. Harriman and the family and stay a few days, but I cannot afford to spend the summer there.”

“Why?” he inquired.

“Because I am busy.”

“What are you doing?”

“Writing a book.”

“Well, you come up to the Lodge and I will show you how to write books. The trouble with you is you are too slow in your beginnings.

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You plan and brood too much. Begin, begin, begin! Put forth what you wish to say in the first words that come to mind, just as you talk, until all that's to go into the book is got down. Then correct, transpose, add, strike out and change as much as you like. Hammer away at it until it suits you. Come on, and get something begun."

So I went to the famous Lodge, intending to stay a few days or a week, but when I spoke of leaving, Mr. Harriman said I must stay and work, and directed his private secretary to follow me and put down everything I said. So I was fairly compelled to make a beginning in

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dictating to a stenographer, which proved rather awkward at first, but in a couple of months a sort of foundation for more than one volume was laid.

The Lodge was beautifully located at the head of Pelican Bay beside its famous crystal springs, the magnificent Klamath Lake in front of it, bordered with meadows and bounded in the distance by dark forested mountains and hills — a fine place for recreation and rest — air, water, and scenery reviving. The weather was mostly cool and bright, just right for soothing exercise, walks in the woods, and boating on the lake, which most of the time

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was mirror-like, reflecting the sky and the fringing meadows and forest-clad mountain shores.

On our return from boat excursions a beautiful picture was outspread before us about an hour before sundown, especially toward autumn, when the colors were ripening — the shining lake enlivened with leaping trout and flocks of waterfowl; the stream from the great springs like a river with broad brown and yellow meadows on either hand; and the dark forested mountains, changing to blue in the background, rising higher and higher, with Mt. Pitt, highest of all, pointing serenely heavenward through the

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midst of the sunset purple and gold.

But even here Mr. Harriman did not enjoy complete rest, for he called his lieutenants about him, and through them and a telegraph wire kept in touch with all his work and world affairs in general. Nevertheless we hoped for lasting benefits from the mountain air and water — nor were we altogether disappointed.

When at length we left the Lodge I accompanied him to Portland. At the stations along the road he was hailed by enthusiastic crowds, assembled to pay their respects, recognizing the good he had done

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and was doing in developing the country and laying broad and deep the foundations of prosperity. A like enthusiasm marked his reception in Portland, and on the return trip a large body of Shriners on their way to Eugene stopped his train by taking possession of the track, climbed over the railing of his car, and literally took him by force and carried him away through the crowd on their shoulders, with cheers and hurrahs as straight from the heart as any I ever heard. The popular tide had turned, sweeping away hatred and most of the old hard railroad mistrust and suspicion. He was at last coming into

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his own after as hard a fair-play battle as man ever won.

In the last years of his life even the Southern Pacific, which had been almost universally disliked and regarded as a public enemy, became popular under his rule of never turning down any complaint whatever. He demanded that every case be taken up by the proper officers and tried, even if it should amount to nothing more than a discourteous answer to a question by an agent at some remote desert station. It was also recognized that no expense was being spared to improve the road not only as a carrier of goods but to make it safer for passengers.

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Every convenience, every precaution against accidents, was put in use at whatever cost.

The serene strength of his mind was manifested by being always equal to whatever might happen or to whatever he wished to do. None I ever knew faced the storm and stress of the world's affairs more calmly and resolutely, nor have I ever known another with such power of performance. He was quiet and reserved in manner, and to those who judged him only from newspaper reports or from meeting him in formal business matters he often seemed unsympathetic, but never so to those who were permitted to

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see beneath the surface. His habit of silence was often remarked. No wonder he had little to say in society when he was carrying the affairs of a continent in his head. With a quick sense of plain right and wrong, and having no words to waste, he spoke with straight-ahead frankness. The same qualities seem inherent in all the family. "Good sense," "Perfectly natural," are phrases oftentimes repeated.

He said he was lucky, but his kind of luck was simply cause and effect. Always resourceful and self-reliant, full of initiative power, heart and mind worked together in turning out thorough and sincere work.

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And that he was far from being a man of one idea is plain from the wide range of public questions to which he turned his attention — education, public libraries, preservation of public parks, etc. The light that always follows good work never ceased to shine on all his ways, and showed him capable of being great in anything he liked. Flashing keenness of insight, quick decision, heroic strength and tenacity of purpose without shadow of turning enabled him to "make good," as he was so fond of saying, in all his undertakings. Overcoming so-called insurmountable obstacles, doing things judged impossible, were

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the tasks he liked best, such, for example, as damming the Colorado flood, filling in a way across the Great Salt Lake, tunnelling the Sierra above Truckee, and rushing all the vast resources at his command with incredible swiftness to the help of San Francisco after the great earthquake and fire.

With his network of roads he heaped benefits of every sort on all alike. Never before have the dry bones of railroad methods been so shaken into orderly effective life. His roads are his monuments, together with the life to which they gave rise, but however substantial, they are less enduring than the love of his friends.

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No enterprise calculated to advance humanity failed to interest him, and few have been in touch with so many lives. He sympathized with his thousands of employees, paid good wages, and studied their welfare, but of course insisted on that strict discipline upon which safety and success in dangerous complicated work depends, making them feel his eyes; promptly weeding out incompetence; educating and encouraging the hopeful and strong. How else could so many wheels be kept on the tracks and rolled to their destination on time? But, however exacting, on none did he throw anything like so heavy a

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burden as the one he himself carried. It seemed too great for any human being.

On his inspection tours, especially in the West along his new roads, his coming was hailed with joy by all classes, and it was this steady development of general good will toward him that cheered his last years. Few fully realize the heroism with which in these last years, while struggling with oncoming illness, he continued to throw himself into his work; gaining new power as he went on his way; enriching himself by enriching others; and increasing the safety, comfort, and general well-being of millions of

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his fellow citizens as well as their wealth.

For money he never cared except as a tool like a locomotive or ship. Before I came to know him I thought like many others that money making might be one of the springs of his action. One evening when the Alaskan Expedition was at Kodiack the scientists, assembled on the forecastle awaiting the dinner bell, began to talk of the blessed ministry of wealth, especially in Mr. Harriman's case, now that some of it was being devoted to science. When these wealth laudations were sounding loudest I teasingly interrupted them, saying, "I don't think Mr.

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Harriman is very rich. He has not as much money as I have. I have all I want and Mr. Harriman has not.” This saying somehow reached Mr. Harriman’s ear and after dinner, seating himself beside me, he said: “I never cared for money except as power for work. I was always lucky and my friends and neighbors, observing my luck, brought their money to me to invest, and in this way I have come to handle large sums. What I most enjoy is the power of creation, getting into partnership with Nature in doing good, helping to feed man and beast, and making everybody and everything a little better and happier.” And

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this has proved true. He earned the means and inherited the courage to do and dare as his great head and heart directed.

He was flashing quick to see the best of things and the best of people. I never saw him bitter or stormily angry or unjust. None I ever knew had a greater capacity for kindness. He was a shrewd judge of character, had strong sense, broad humanity, and like underground irrigating streams did much in quiet, hidden ways for clubs, schools, churches, public parks, neglected children, etc., always ready to lend a hand

To him I owe some of the most precious moments of my life. The

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memories of heart-to-heart talks that pleasant summer at Klamath Lake I shall always treasure with reverent affection, together with those of our last days at Pasadena, when, in the midst of his own crushing cares, he lavished whole-hearted sympathy and care on my sick child. I never knew a warmer heart. Our last meeting was in Los Angeles, at a public reception, where I was delighted with the good wishes and respect accorded him by the multitude that pressed around him to shake his hand. But when the meeting broke up, leaving him weary and pale, there fell a foreboding shadow that I could never shake off.

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He will not be forgotten. Respect and admiration for his wonderful talents, and love for the greatness of his heart and service, are every day growing. And although scarce any one as yet is able to make anything like a fair estimate of his life and character, almost everybody comes at last to know a good man. His influence is touching everything, and he is coming to be recognized as one of the rare souls Heaven sends into the world once in centuries. When his work was finished his friends sang, "Well, done!" and soon or late the world must join in their "Well done!" song

THE END

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